

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4135

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

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AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

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EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PFOR, IN, BG

SUBJ: FARAKKA: GOI REJOINDER TO BDG

REF: NEW DELHI 2410

1. ALL DELHI PAPERS FEBRUARY 19 DEVOTED FRONT-PAGE HEADLINES TO MEA OFFICIAL'S STATEMENT, FEB 18, THAT RESPONSIBILITY FOR FAILURE TO REACH AGREEMENT ON SHARING THE GANGES WATERS WOULD REST WITH THE BDG. THE SPOKESMAN, WHOSE PRESENTATION WAS MUCH ALONG THE LINE TAKEN BY MEA JOINT SECRETARY AJMANI (REFTEL, WAS REPLYING TO THE BD MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS SPOKESMAN'S STATEMENT REPORTED DACCA 806. THE INDIAN SPOKESMAN REPORTEDLY SAID THAT THE BDG'S SUGGESTION THAT INDIA STOP WITHDRAWING WATER FROM FARAKKA AS A CONDITION FOR TALKS WAS UNACCEPTABLE. HE INTERPRETED THE BDG POSITION TO MEAN THAT WATER SHOULD NOT BE USED EVEN DURING THE "NON-LEAN" PERIOD AND SAID THAT THIS QUESTION HAS NEVER ARISEN, SINCE THE PROBLEM IN THAT PERIOD IS EXCESS

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WATER AND FLOODING RATHER THAN SHARING OF A LIMITED

SUPPLY.

2. THE PRESS REPORTS THAT THE GOI SENT THE BDG A NOTE ON FEB 11 OFFERING TO HOLD EARLY TALKS ON THE WATER ISSUE AND THAT NO FORMAL BDG REPLY HAD BEEN RECEIVED.

3. THE GOI SPOKESMAN IS FURTHER QUOTED BY THE PRESS AS SAYING: "THE HUE AND CRY PRESENTLY BEING RAISED IN THE BANGLADESH PRESS, AFTER A LAPSE OF 9 MONTHS, POINTS TO OBJECTIVES OTHER THAN THOSE RELATED TO THE USE OF GANGA WATERS AT FARAKKA DURING LEAN MONTHS." HE ARGUED THAT IT WAS PROVEN BEYOND DOUBT THAT THE PRESENT RATE OF INDIAN WITHDRAWAL OF WATER HAD NOT CAUSED ANY HARM TO BANGLADESH NOR WOULD IT DO SO IN THE FUTURE. THE SPOKESMAN REGRETTED THAT THAT THE ATMOSPHERE FOR TALKS WAS SOUGHT TO BE VITIATED BY A FALSE AND MISLEADING CAMPAIGN IN THE BANGLADESH PRESS. THE GOI, HE SAID, HAD DRAWN THE ATTENTION OF THE BDG TO THIS "WILLFUL AND FLAGRANT" VIOLATION OF THE UNDERSTANDING TO DISCOURAGE HOSTILE PROPAGANDA.

4. THE GOI SPOKESMAN ALSO SAID: "THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA HAS ALSO EXPRESSED ITS ASTONISHMENT AT THE EXTRAORDINARY AND UNJUSTIFIED DEMAND THAT ANY WITHDRAWAL DURING ANY PART OF THE YEAR AT FARAKKA, OR FURTHER UPSTREAM, SHOULD BE SUBJECT TO PRIOR APPROVAL OF THE GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH. IT IS ALSO CLAIMED THAT WITHDRAWAL OF THE WATER FROM THE GANGA UPSTREAM IN INDIA IS ALREADY AFFECTING RIVER CONDITIONS AND CAUSING ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES IN BANGLADESH. THE ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES AND THE CHANGE OF RIVER CONDITIONS HAVE NOT BEEN DESCRIBED, LET ALONE SUBSTANTIATED BY ANY FACTUAL DATE." THE SPOKESMAN COMPLAINED THAT THE JOINT EXPERTS COMMITTEE APPOINTED IN MAY 1974 WAS UNABLE TO REACH ANY CONCLUSIONS ON BANGLADESH WATER REQUIREMENTS DUE TO THE LACK OF FACILITIES MADE AVAILABLE TO THE INDIAN EXPERTS.

5. IMPLYING THAT INDIA HAD A STRONGER CLAIM TO THE GANGA WATERS THAN BANGLADESH, THE INDIAN SPOKESMAN POINTED OUT THAT 98 PERCENT OF THE CATCHMENT AREA, 94.5 PERCENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF THE ULTIMATE IRRIGATION POTENTIAL, AND 94 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION OF THE GANGA BASIN WERE IN INDIA.

6. IN A SOMEWHAT MORE CONCILIATORY TONE THE GOI SPOKESMAN SAID THAT INDIA APPRECIATED BANGLADESH'S NEED FOR WATER DURING THE LEAN MONTHS AND THAT INDIA WOULD NEVER WISH TO HARM THE LEGITIMATE INTERESTS OF BANGLADESH. HOWEVER, HE ADDED, FARAKKA HAD BEEN BUILT A A HUGE CONST; IT

WAS THE ONLY MEANS OF PRESERVING CALCUTTA PORT AND COULD NOT BE ABANDONED. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE FARAKKA WATER CANAL HAD BEEN OPERATING AT NEAR TO OR AT THE OPTIMUM CAPACITY OF 40,000 CUSECS SINCE JUNE 1975. THIS, HE CLAIMED, WAS ALSO TO BANGLADESH'S BENEFIT; OTHERWISE THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN A FLOODING PROBLEM.
SAXBE

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